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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

The Old and New Testament Student

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MANY minds are confused and disturbed by the differences of opinion which prevail concerning the Sacred Scriptures. In the majority of cases the question which one asks himself has finally come to be, Do I stand with the old or with the new school? In asking this question we sometimes forget that the old and the new include each many widely divergent phases of thought. The whole matter, however, reduces itself to a question of *attitude of mind* with respect to the method or manner in which certain great religious ideas have come into existence. It is only in the most subordinate sense that the differences between the two schools have to do with the thought itself. The question is, *How?* not, *What?*

Not infrequently representatives of both schools unduly magnify these points of difference. This is done for the most part by ignoring the points of agreement. This agreement is of a more substantial character than the difference. As has been said, the differences have to do, not with facts, but with the explanation of facts. If the most conservative representatives of the old school were to make a list of one hundred statements relating to the facts included in the whole range of Old and New Testament history, and the ideas embodied in that history, the representatives of the newer school, excluding its extreme radical members, would subscribe to 90 per cent. of the statements thus

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DIFFERENCES
MAGNIFIED



THE ARCH OF TITUS ON THE VIA SACRA AT ROME.

presented. So thoroughly real are the great personalities and events of sacred history that no sober-minded man can for a moment deny their existence. Indeed, to do so is to raise a question as to one's own scientific sanity. It is fair to ask whether enough has been made of this agreement between the two schools, and whether the representatives of both sides have not done themselves a serious injury in their effort to show how far they disagree with each other, rather than how far they agree. Is there not an analogy here in the case of the various denominations? In some sections of the country the rivalry is so bitter as to convince the outsider who is not a Christian that these denominations have practically nothing in common, but are engaged in a warfare for the purpose of each other's destruction. This is the conviction which has been produced on the minds of the general public by the conflict that has in these recent years been waged between the two divisions of the Christian army, whose energy has been spent in large measure in destroying the power of each other rather than in united effort against the common foe, materialistic agnosticism.

It may be repeated that the real difference is one which relates not to fact, but to method or manner. No one denies that God has revealed himself. It is a question, *THE REAL DIFFERENCE* How has this revelation been made? No one doubts the peculiar character of Israelitish history or the great events which make that history stand out so prominently, for example, the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Palestine, the division of the nation into two kingdoms, the Babylonian captivity, the restoration, the strange vicissitudes of the Maccabees. It is only a question as to the relation of these events to other historical events which were transpiring among other nations, and the interpretation of the events in the progressive self-revelation of God himself. No one doubts that there was given to the Hebrew nation legislative codes the most ideal in character of any that have been adopted among men. It is a question how these codes came to be adopted and what is their relationship to each other. No one doubts that the

Israelitish prophets knew beforehand and declared beforehand the calamities and the blessings which were to come upon Israel and upon humanity. It is a question, (1) how closely related was this knowledge to the situation in which they themselves stood, and (2) whether the use made of that knowledge was particularly concerned with their own times or with future times. No one doubts the great facts connected with the birth of Christianity. It is a question how those facts stand related to the preceding history. No fundamental principle of Christianity, no essential principle of ethics, is denied. The only questions raised have to do with the history of these principles.

The closing words of the preceding paragraph furnish the key to the situation. The cause of the division into two camps is to be found in the growing prevalence of the historical spirit; a spirit which compels those who possess it to go back step by step in order to obtain, if possible, the very beginnings of an idea or institution, and having found these beginnings, to trace forward the steady growth and development of the same; a spirit which likewise compels those who possess it to compare the ideas and institutions of one nation with those of other nations closely related, and from this comparative study to determine as nearly as possible the influences exerted from without, as well as those exerted from within. It is this historical and comparative study that has led to the division of opinion which has come to exist. Those who have not yet adopted this method of study naturally cannot estimate its value, or accept the conclusions which have been reached in accordance with it. What is involved in the historical method? Reduced to its simplest form it amounts to this: Instead of accepting this or that popular statement or conception of a character or an event as final on the ground merely that such a statement has been made, the historical student goes back for facts to the documents of the age to which the character or event belonged, and endeavors from these to determine the true and unprejudiced account. Dealing thus with the documents of successive ages, he is able

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to reproduce the history of the growth of the idea, and to explain how it assumed this or that definite form in different periods. This is the simplest method possible, and in all other departments of thought this method today rules supreme. In addition it is, of course, necessary for the student to consider the idea or institution as it may be found in other nations, and to make the necessary comparisons. This, however, is only carrying still further the historical study. In order to trace the history of any idea in this way it is necessary to arrange the documents of each century in their proper order, that is, in the order in which they had their origin. This is, in one sense, literary work, but from another point of view it is historical. This, then, is what is involved in historical work: (1) the proper arrangement beforehand of the materials from which information is to be gathered; (2) the gathering of the information in historical and scientific order; and (3) the comparison of this information with information of a similar character obtained from the documents of other nations. It becomes a serious matter, it must be confessed, when this kind of work is undertaken by those who beforehand have decided that there is no God, or that there is no such thing as foreknowledge of events, or that there is no such thing as a miracle. Those who conduct their study on these presuppositions will naturally reach conclusions far wide of the truth and exercise a mischievous influence; but the fact that some men undertake the work with these presuppositions and reach results of this character does not in any way affect the value of the method. It is only necessary in this case to point out the lack of scientific honesty in those who deny factors which are the most important in the case. The atheist believes that the earth is round. Shall the Christian refuse thus to believe because, in so doing, he finds himself in company with the atheist? Men who do not believe in a personal God adopt the historical method of study. Shall the Christian student for this reason refuse to adopt the historical method, the only true and scientific method?

The historical method discloses the fact that God's revelation of himself has been made in accordance with certain great

principles. There has been no caprice, no arbitrary movement in it. It has taken the form of teaching, and, as such, presents those methods of teaching which, when employed, will prove most successful when man himself is teacher as well as taught. It has associated itself with the history of mankind, and has found concrete expression in the lives and characters of the great men of all ages. It has come through man himself, and for this reason has been adapted to the needs of man in the particular generation in which it was presented. It has made use of institutions and ideas which in many cases had represented all that was gross and unclean, but in every case there have been a purification and an illumination which together have transformed all that was low and mean to something high and lofty. So distinct and definite are these principles as drawn from the revelation itself, considered historically, that they may be called laws. In any case we find that every act of revelation has limited itself by these laws, or, to put the same thought in other form, Divine Wisdom has seen fit to display itself in accordance with these principles. So regular and methodical is the operation of these laws that they may fairly be said to be as unalterable as the laws of nature. Do they exclude the miracle? No, for the miracle is not a divine caprice, but an action strictly in accordance with the law of the Divine Being. Do they exclude prophecy? No, for prophecy, as properly understood, is only the declaration of the divine laws concerning man and his relation to God. Law is found to be supreme. Everything becomes clear, and the plan of God working through man and in man becomes, from the historical point of view, something so beautiful, so symmetrical, so sublime that a new conception of God himself comes to the man who thus perceives the laws in accordance with which the Deity has worked.

The use of the historical method discloses further that God has acted subjectively rather than objectively. The old view made man a machine, God the manipulator of the machine. The old view made that which could be seen by the eye or

heard by the ear more real than that which is seen and heard by the spirit of man. In other words, it placed the material above the spiritual. The highest form of divine communication was that in which God spoke face to face with Moses, that is, in literal words, rather than that in which God appealed to the soul of the prophet who was to become the agent of the divine work. The old view placed God on the outside of everything rather than on the inside; represented him as standing off at a distance rather than as entering into the very inmost part of life and history. This view was really a childish view, the child being unable to conceive God as spirit. It was really a pagan view, the pagan being unable to think of God as other than an exalted man, dealing with men as men deal with each other. The newer view, in laying emphasis upon the subjective side, furnishes not only a truer but a deeper and broader conception of God. The same may be said of the different conception of Jesus which is thus obtained.

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OBJECTIVE*

There is no one who supposes that the revelation of God is other than gradual or progressive; yet many have failed to comprehend the full meaning of this proposition. A progressive revelation implies (1) a revelation which had a beginning and which in the early stages must have been very crude and indefinite because of the character of the people for whom it was intended; (2) a revelation which with every age received accretions, new light being given to the people when they were able to receive it; (3) a revelation which was, for the time being, partial and imperfect, indefinite and incomplete; (4) a revelation which was, therefore, a growth or development, regular and in accordance with laws; (5) a revelation which came from within rather than from without; subjective rather than objective; (6) a revelation, the details of which may be arranged in historical order and studied in the order in which they were given; (7) a revelation, the historical order of which will be found to be the logical order. But now, if God works from the inside rather

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GROWTH OR
DEVELOPMENT*

than from the outside, is it not possible that misconception attaches to the phrase "revelation of God to man"? This expression itself has grown out of the view which makes the work of God something objective. Is it not better to conceive God as working in and through man; every step forward, as a new and higher conception on the part of man of the Great Spirit which has filled all space and all time, which surrounds and envelops man himself, and of which man, created in the image of God, is himself a part? As the ages pass, men are gradually lifted out of the darkness and obscurity into the light. The light has always existed and man has lived in it, but only in later times has man himself been able to see and appreciate the light in which he has always lived.

One of the most important points between the Old and the New Testaments is this: The Old Testament teaches us *What*, but not *How*. The New Testament teaches us *How*, as well as *What*. The people of the Old Testament times believed most profoundly in a personal God. The thunder was his voice. Lightning was the flash of his spear. The earth quaked at his bidding. Pestilence came at his word. They were not acquainted with the laws of the atmosphere or the laws of geology, or the laws of hygiene. They knew God, and they understood that God in these matters acted directly. They were right in their conception. These things are the work of God. But they were wrong, because of their ignorance of the fact that God always acts in accordance with laws. The method and the manner of the divine operation were not the subject of their thought. In the coming of Jesus Christ and in the teaching of the New Testament all this was changed. Then, for the first time, man began to know how God worked, and every century since the birth of Christianity has added something to our knowledge of the divine method of work. The discoveries of science in the realm of nature have, in these last years, given us a world of information concerning God's method of work in nature; and the discoveries of historical study have revealed to us many things concerning the

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working of God's spirit in humanity. Men stand aghast at the discoveries of science and ask each other in bated breath, What next? The discoveries of science in the realm of mind, the progress that has been made by man in the understanding of man himself—these have been no less wonderful and give no less promise for the future. Is there, in many quarters, a lack of appreciation of these modern discoveries? It is because the spirit of the Old Testament rather than that of the New prevails; the spirit that is satisfied with answering the question, *What?* rather than the spirit which demands as well an answer to the question, *How?*